

THE MILITARY OPERATIONS

OF THE FALL OF 1956

IN EASTERN EUROPE

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I. Prelude

Under the rule of Joseph Stalin the Soviet Union achieved a level of military strength enabling it to dominate all its neighbors from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, a military strength which included not only large conventional forces, but also a rapidly developing nuclear capability. This military strength was utilized to maintain totalitarian political systems in both the Soviet Union itself and in the satellite states, systems which exacted a heavy price in both economic and political terms from the peoples governed. Despite the existence of many individuals who, in the Soviet Union, in the satellites, and in the West, were anxious to alter this Soviet position of power or the uses to which it was being put, no effective pressures for change came into play until the death of Stalin in 1953.

With Stalin's death, there developed in the Soviet Union a more or less collective rule of Presidium members, headed first by Georgi Malenkov, and after his toppling in 1955, by Nikita Khrushchev. The fact that a majority of this "collective rule" was constantly in favor of a serious departure from the Stalinist pattern represented a dis-equilibrating influence for the entire Communist system, not only in the changed desires thus operative in Moscow, but also in the resulting increase in power of those individuals in the satellites (and in the West) who desired

still greater changes.

Relative to the satellites, the new program of the Presidium evolved into a desire for serious and substantial domestic reforms (similar to those introduced in the Soviet Union itself) coupled with the retention, however, of the Soviet military power embodied in the rigid alliance system developed under Stalin.¹ If (as was inevitable) these objectives should come into conflict with each other the maintenance of Soviet hegemony would be given priority over liberalization, but since it could never be perfectly seen where choice was necessary and where it was not, the policy of "de-Stalinization" in the satellites tended to be uneven, both over time and from country to country. Nowhere in the satellites had this two-elemented transition desired by the Soviet leadership been accomplished by 1956.

Events of late 1956 indicated, moreover, that due to unforeseen events Soviet hegemony was in fact about to be lost in two of the satellites, and that militarily independent forces serving the desires of individuals in these satellites (and, incidentally, the interests of the West) were about to challenge those of the Soviet Union.

¹. Complete discussions of Soviet policy with regard to the satellites are to be found in Zbigniew Brzezinski, The Soviet Bloc, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, and David J. Dallin, Soviet Foreign Policy After Stalin, New York, 1961.

II. October 18-21, 1956

The military operations of the fall of 1956 in eastern Europe can be stated to have begun on or about Thursday, October 18, with the initiation of a program of reinforcement and repositioning of Soviet armed forces in Poland.¹ This constituted a response to expressions by portions of the Polish state and Communist Party organizations indicating a serious dissatisfaction with previous policies of the Soviet Union, and a desire to be more independent of such policies in the future. These expressions had taken the form of a refusal by Edward Ochab, the incumbent head of the Polish party, to come to Moscow for talks, and of the imminent election without Soviet consent of a new Polish Politburo, involving the ouster of the Russian Marshal Rokossovsky as head of the Polish armed forces, and the election of the "anti-Stalinist" Wladyslaw Gomulka as Premier and party chief.²

Widespread Soviet troop movements occurred in Poland between the 18th and 20th of October, with the two-division contingent already stationed in the country under the Warsaw Pact moving toward the capitol, and four more divisions coming in across the borders of the Soviet Union and East Germany.³

Quick action taken over this period, however, by the Polish state and party organizations (which had on the 15th

1. New York Times, October 21, 1956, p. 1:7.

2. Dallin, Op. Cit., p. 358.

3. New York Times, October 21, 1956, p. 1:7.

of October already informally accepted Gomulka's leadership) served to ensure the presence in the Warsaw area of Polish military units not subject to Russian command.¹ A few widely-scattered instances of shooting took place between Polish and Soviet units, the most prominent incident occurring near Szczecin (Stettin), where Russian troops crossing the border from East Germany were fired upon. This was the first instance of combat in the military operations of the fall of 1956 in eastern Europe.²

A Soviet delegation, including party chief Nikita Khrushchev, Vice Premier Anastas Mikoyan, and Presidium members L. M. Kaganovich and V.M. Molotov, arrived in Warsaw uninvited on Friday, October 19th, demanding talks with the new Polish leadership. Ochab and Gomulka at this point insisted on the return of Soviet forces to their positions of the 17th, threatening to use the Polish army against the Soviets if necessary, promising on the other hand that the major innovations of Gomulka's program would be confined to the domestic sphere, with no significant change in Poland's international alignments.³

Soviet force began moving back to their original stations on the 20th of October, as the Russian delegation returned to Moscow. The Polish Politburo elections were held as scheduled on October 21, and Rokossovsky was immediately thereafter given his leave of absence as Polish armed forces

1. Brzezinski, Op. Cit., p.253.

2. New York Times, October 21, 1956 p.1:7.

3. Brzezinski, Op. Cit., p.258.

commander.¹

The events of the Polish change of administration, particularly the failure of the Soviets to consummate their intervention, drew considerable notice both inside and outside the Communist bloc, this notice taking the form in the West of a generally cautious approval. The United States Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, in a television interview on the 21st of October expressed his satisfaction with the accession of Gomulka, together with his hope that the Soviets would not intervene; Dulles definitely ruled out, however, any Western military action in the event of Soviet intervention.²

While anticipated negative reactions of Western and neutral opinion may have carried some weight in Soviet appraisals of intervention (perhaps more important were the reactions of Tito and of the Chinese Communist leadership, who were sympathetic to Gomulka) these factors were probably overshadowed by the direct information received by the Soviet delegation in Warsaw concerning Polish intentions and capabilities. The Soviet decision to pull back from the Warsaw area was made in the face of the increased costs of a coup (the obvious Polish military preparedness) and the reduced gains of such a coup (if Polish assurances were believable).

For some combination of the above considerations, the

¹.Dallin, Op. Cit., p. 361.

².New York Times, October 22, 1956, p. 1:4.

Soviets withdrew, but a good amount of time was yet to pass before the Polish government was to be convinced that the Soviets had completely given up the idea of intervention. A truce of sorts ensued, in which both sides, however, were seeking to bolster the strength of their military positions; a change in the assessments of either's intentions or capabilities could quickly have led to the expansion of the struggle into more violent forms.

III. October 21-24

Units of the Soviet army along the borders of Hungary had been alerted for movement between the 18th and 21st of October, and began entering Hungary on the latter date, from the Soviet Union itself, and from Rumania.¹ Simultaneously, forces in Hungary under the Warsaw Pact were ordered to new positions closer to the larger Hungarian cities, in particular Budapest, while Hungarian units under Russian command were dispersed as widely as possible, surrounded by Soviet forces, sent on leave, or otherwise neutralised.²

Unlike Poland, no changes lacking the consent of Moscow has occurred as yet at the top of the Hungarian political hierarchy, but the inclination and intentions of the state organization as a whole had been made uncertain by a great outburst of reform agitation in the lower levels of the Communist Party (especially in the student and youth organizations, such as the DISZ, and its offshoot, the Petofi Circle). These organizations had for some time been demanding a greater independence of and equality with the Soviet Union, and a domestic "de-Stalinization" of the regime (including the reinstatement of former Premier Imre Nagy, whose rule from 1953 to 1955 had been remembered as a liberal one).³

1. United Nations, Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary, New York, 1957, par. 157.

2. Ibid, par. 204.

3. Ferenc Vali, Rift and Revolt in Hungary, Cambridge, Mass., 1961, p. 266.

Meetings, rallies and demonstrations to these ends had become an almost daily occurrence in the early fall of 1956. The news of the successful change-over in Poland, however, brought matters to a head. On Monday, October 22, as Soviet troop movements were already in progress, a large student rally at the Technological University for Building Industry, in Budapest, endorsed a 16 point program which embodied the content of most of the manifestos being circulated at the time, the "16 Points" including the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Hungary, the return of Nagy to the Premiership, new elections by secret ballot, in the Communist Party, governmental elections including non-Communist parties, a restoration of civil liberties, and a renegotiation of the economic agreements with the Soviet Union.¹

At this rally at the Technological University, it was further resolved to schedule a demonstration for the following afternoon (the 23rd) at the statue of General Bem, a Polish supporter of the Hungarian revolution of 1848, the choice of location clearly indicating the tone and inclination of the demonstration.

Erno Gero, the "Stalinist" leader of the Hungarian Communist Party, was just arriving in Budapest on the morning of the 23rd, back from a series of conferences in Yugoslavia with Marshal Tito, conferences intended by

¹I.Vall, Op. Cit., p. 267.

Khrushchev to get Tito to moderate his hostility to the "Stalinist" Hungarian regime, and thereby to help stabilize it. (Tito had however made public statements of support for the Polish developments during the conferences, statements which could not be of help to Gero.) ¹

The initial reaction of the regime to the planned demonstration was to broadcast an announcement at 12:55 P.M. forbidding it; in view of the crowd's obvious determination to go ahead, however, another announcement was made at 2:25 rescinding the ban. The demonstration took place in the middle of the afternoon, drawing a large crowd estimated at over 100,000 people to hear various manifestos generally patterned along lines similar to the contents of the "16 Points". ²

Following the demonstration, portions of the crowd began indulging in such patriotically symbolic actions as the removal of the Soviet emblem from the Hungarian flag, and the destruction of the statue of Stalin, while others moved toward the parliament building to seek a speech from Nagy, or toward the radio station to demand a broadcasting of their program. ³

Nagy's speech to the crowd at about 7 P.M. was moderate and indecisive, to some extent, perhaps, because he was still in the physical control of agents of the AVH (or AVO) the secret police organization of Hungary.

1. Richard Lowenthal, "Tito's Affair With Khrushchev", New Leader, XLI (October 6, 1958), p. 12.

2. United Nations, Op. Cit., par. 54..

3. Ibid, par. 55.

Gero went on the air at about 8 P.M. however to denounce the demonstrations as counterrevolutionary and to insist that the hordes of people milling around the city return to their homes.¹

This drove the crowd at the radio station to press their demands for a broadcasting of their programs, to which a force of AVH men at the station responded with gunfire. These were the beginnings of the second instance of combat in the military operations of the fall of 1956 in eastern Europe.²

Arms from various government sources (the army, arms factories, militia stockpiles) became available to the crowds in the streets almost immediately.³ As violence against the AVH spread throughout the city, the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party (still dominated by Gero) was called into special session at about 11 P. M., and an appeal for Soviet assistance was sent out to the bases ringing Budapest.⁴ The nearest armored forces, coming a distance of about 100 miles, arrived at 2 A.M. on the morning of Wednesday, the 24th of October, and started occupying the Danube bridges and other communication centers in the city, meeting little resistance until daybreak.⁵

The nature, motives and leadership of their opposition still being quite uncertain, the Soviet forces in Hungary thus found themselves in the beginnings of a small war.

1. Vali, Op. Cit., p. 268.

2. United Nations, Op. Cit., par. 6.

3. Tibor Meray, Thirteen Days That Shook The Kremlin, New York, 1959, p. 71.

4. Vali, Op. Cit., p. 276

5. United Nations, Op. Cit., par. 154

IV. October 24-28

The Central Committee, continuing its deliberations into the morning of the 24th, decided to appoint Imre Nagy as Premier in place of the incumbent Gero protege Andre Hegedus, this appointment being obviously intended as a compromise with the rebels. (Nagy had, in fact, only been readmitted to the party two weeks earlier, in response to conditions set by Tito as the price of his conferences with Gero.)

Nagy was informed of his selection and of the arrival of Soviet troops, and was directed to publicly take responsibility for having called the troops in, which, despite his virtual house arrest by the AVH and his lack of contact with the rebels, Nagy refused to do.¹ Nagy did go on the air on the 24th, however, to urge the crowds to go home and cease firing, an appeal he was to make regularly for the next four days.²

The Soviet columns moving into the city of Budapest consisted primarily of armored units, with little or no infantry support, due in part to the need for speed in getting these forces into the city, and in part to the original role of these forces as Warsaw Pact contingents designed to fight in conjunction with Hungarian and Rumanian infantry.³

1. Vail, Op. Cit., p. 276.

2. Meray, Op. Cit., p. 97.

3. Noel Barber, A Handful of Ashes, London, 1957, p. 48.

Opposing the Russians on the morning of the 24th and for the next four days were only a few units of the Hungarian army itself, including, most importantly, a force of 1200 men holding a position dominating the Danube in the Kilian Barracks, under the command of Colonel Pal Maleter (who, having been ordered by Gero to attack the rebels, had changed sides and was later to become the military commander of all rebel forces); there arose in addition, however, a large number of ad hoc formations of "freedom fighters" who semi-spontaneously started attacking any Russian tanks attempting to move into the heart of the city. The weapons of the Hungarians at this stage consisted primarily of light machine guns, a few anti-tank guns and a very few tanks, augmented by a seemingly general knowledge of the techniques of the legendary "Molotov Cocktail" anti-tank weapon (a bottle full of gasoline with a cloth or hand-grenade fuse).¹

Fighting between the Soviet forces and the rebels took an on-again-off-again form in the following days, as the Russians showed a seeming reluctance to do great physical damage to the city. In the absence of authorization to destroy buildings, tanks unescorted by infantry became obviously vulnerable in the confines of an intact metropolis, and no determined pushes were made from the banks of the Danube into the city.²

1. Ibid.

2. Meray, Op. Cit., p. 111.

Fighting would occur in one block, while Soviet tank crews would be fraternising with Hungarians on the next. Local Soviet commanders showed a confusion as to their real function, having in certain cases expected to be fighting Americans, or Germans, or at best, local Fascists.¹ The occasional overlapping of areas of combat with areas of truce led to some tragic deaths, as in the case of the afternoon of Thursday, the 25th, before the Parliament building, where a large friendly crowd had begun mixing with the Soviet tank crews, only to have some AVH men fire into the crowd, whereupon the Soviet crews, not knowing who was firing at whom, began to fire themselves, causing heavy casualties.²

In the provinces, a number of similar rebellions occurred in the middle-sized cities after the 24th, with the AVH however bearing the brunt of the fury of the mob, and relatively few instances of combat taking place between rebels and Soviet forces. The Russians appeared to be reluctant, in fact, to engage in combat anywhere outside of Budapest, and did not attack in the provinces unless an attempt was made to interfere with their movements, while the Hungarian rebels were generally content to assert their control over the government of the towns, without going so far as to challenge the Soviets.³

1. Francois Tejto, Behind The Rape of Hungary, New York, 1957, p. 200.

2. Meray, Op. Cit., p. 111.

3. United Nations, Op. Cit., par. 204.

On the afternoon of the first full day of the rebellion, the Soviet emissaries, Mikoyan and Presidium member A. Suslov, arrived in Budapest, expressing a general dissatisfaction with Gero for having embroiled the Soviet forces in a shooting war, for having allowed the AVH to begin shooting in the first place, and generally for having failed to introduce the reforms necessary to forestall the revolt. The two representatives expressed a satisfaction with Nagy and his views on Hungarian domestic affairs, and showed anxiousness to accomplish the cease-fire and Soviet withdrawal from the city that Nagy himself had been urging. The following day, the two Russians ordered the replacement of Gero as party chief by Janos Kadar (also a "liberal", previously imprisoned by the "Stalinists"), and Gero accompanied the Russians on their trip back to Moscow on Friday, the 26th.¹

World reaction after the 24th to the involvement of Soviet armed forces in Budapest was generally unfavorable, but this reaction tended to take imprecise forms due to a general confusion as to exactly what was happening in Hungary. The scarcity of information in Washington was aggravated by the loss of communications lines for a time after the 24th, and by the absence of an American Minister in Budapest (as a rotation of personelle was in progress).²

President Eisenhower, in a series of statements on

¹. Meray, Op. Cit., p. 106.

². New York Times, October 25, 1956, p 1:7.

the 25th of October, deplored the use of Soviet troops in Hungary, and (in the distributed version of a campaign speech abbreviated in delivery for television purposes) emphasised the American intention to use only "peaceful means" to end the Soviet intervention, thus following the tone of Dulles' earlier remarks on Poland.¹

By the 27th of October, with fighting still reported to be continuing, the United States, Britain, and France had requested a session of the United Nations Security Council, which met on Sunday, the 28th, and voted to place the events in Hungary on its agenda. The fact that the incumbent and still certified Hungarian delegate, Peter Kos, protested the action served, again, however, to somewhat confuse the issue.²

Confusion as to the exact facts did not, however, prevent the various anti-Communist radio stations in Munich (including the official United States Voice of America, the semi-official Radio Free Europe, and several independents) from embarking on an expanded news and information program after the 24th. The general content of these broadcasts over the following two weeks was to consist of demands for pronounced and early changes in the Hungarian status quo, of attacks on Nagy for being too much of a Communist and for allegedly having called in the Soviet troops, and of vague statements with poorly

1. Ibid., October 26, 1956, p.1:1.

2. Ibid., October 29, 1956, p.1:5.

chosen supporting quotations relative to American intentions for Hungary and eastern Europe.¹

Between the 25th and 28th of October, Nagy gradually succeeded in assuming the real powers of Premier, and in establishing contact with representatives of rebel groups inside and outside of Budapest (although AVH men continued to be present at his first three conferences with the rebel delegates, on the 25th, 26th and 28th of October).² The first fruits of this new liaison came with a gradual acceptance by the "freedom fighters" of Nagy's appeal for a cease-fire (achieved on the 28th), which the Soviets had been more or less willing to accept since the 25th.³ The rebels thus had started their revolt with a candidate, NAGY, but without a single leader; now, gradually, but only gradually, the rebels began accepting their candidate as their leader too.

The Soviet avoidance of involvement in serious or extended combat between the 24th and 28th was largely due to a genuine confusion as to how to interpret the developments of the period. While a serious rebellion had been anticipated (accounting for the initial troop movements) the Soviets also still had hoped to head off such a rebellion (and to achieve a desirable "de-Stalinization") by themselves recalling Nagy. Now that the rebellion had already occurred, in a relatively limited

1. Leslie B. Bain, The Reluctant Satellites, New York, 1960, p. 110.

2. United Nations, Op. Cit., par. 234.

3. Vali, Op. Cit., p. 291.

form with the rebels in fact calling for Nagy, the Soviet leadership either would have to conclude that the rebellion was less odious than had been anticipated, or to discover that Nagy was less reliable than had been thought.

The Soviets therefore were at least temporarily disposed toward a truce, a truce during which Russian strength could be augmented without any permanent damage being done, a truce to continue at least until the real nature of the somewhat surprising Nagy regime showed itself.

The appeal for the cease-fire on Nagy's part stemmed from a desire to avoid useless destruction and loss of life in Budapest, from a desire to achieve some discipline in lining up the rebel bands behind his government, and from deeper long-range motives which both the rebels and the Soviets were only gradually to discover.¹

The military equilibrium thus established was hardly stable, however, both in the fact that Nagy would have to commit himself more and more over time, and in the fact that as the power balance swung more and more in the Soviets' favor, incentives to continue the truce might disappear. Limits to the level of conflict had indeed been imposed by the 28th of October, but, as in Poland, the existence of a rationale for these limits was quite precarious.

¹.United Nations, Op. Cit., par.238.

V. October 28 - November 4

In the period between the rebels' original demands for Nagy's reappointment, and the cease-fire, their faith in Nagy had been weakened by government and Western broadcasts claiming that Nagy had invited the Soviet forces into Budapest, and by Nagy's statements themselves, which left a confusing impression on his listeners, especially in view of the rebels' inability to achieve direct contact with him.¹

Nagy now at each of his conferences with the rebel delegates expressed a general and substantial agreement with the contents of their various manifestos, expressing reservations only as to the speed possible and advisable in the implementation of such relatively radical proposals as the seeking of Soviet withdrawal from all of Hungary, the introduction of multi-party government, and the holding of free elections.²

Nagy had in fact (to some extent perhaps because of the violence of his years of struggle against the "Stalinist" wing of the party) become privately committed not only to serious domestic reforms and whatever readjustments of external alignment were appropriate thereto, but also to the achievement of Hungarian national independence and neutrality for its own sake.³

1. United Nations, Op. Cit., par. 234.

2. Ibid.

3. For a full discussion of the development of the political outlooks of the various factions of the Hungarian party, see Paul Kecskemeti, The Unexpected Revolution, Stanford, Calif., 1961.

On Saturday, the 27th of October, Nagy announced the formation of a new "People's Patriotic Government", substantially "de-Stalinized", with a trace of non-Communist representation including Bela Kovacs, a onetime leader of the Smallholders Party (which had been forced to merge with the Communists), and Zoltan Tildy, who had also been a member of the Smallholders, and President of the Hungarian Republic from 1946 to 1948, when there had still been a multi-party government. Nagy confirmed, in this announcement, his intentions of securing an immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest, and as soon as possible thereafter, from all of Hungary; he simultaneously recognized as representatives of the people the various rebel "National Councils" and "Workers' Councils" which had sprung up in portions of Budapest and the provinces, agreeing to receive these councils' proposals with a view to writing them into his government's program.¹

As the Nagy program thus developed (to some extent fostered by radio broadcasts from Munich, leading to demands by various rebel bodies for faster action, leading to new timetables for Nagy) it came to include the abolition of the AVH (October 29th), the restoration of real multi-party government and free elections (announced on Tuesday, the 30th), and the cancellation of the Warsaw Pact (announced on the 1st of November, to some extent in response to

¹.Vali, Op. Cit., p. 297.

reports of Soviet troop movements).¹

The local Soviet commanders in Budapest, in general conformity with the agreements by Mikoyan and Suslov, had announced the beginnings of their withdrawal from Budapest on Sunday, the 28th of October. The operation, however, was carried out in a somewhat dilatory manner, not being completed until Wednesday, the 31st of October. Units of the Hungarian Air Force on Tuesday, the 30th, threatened to attack the Soviet forces if they did not accelerate their withdrawal, but this attack was ordered cancelled by the Nagy government, only to be followed by Soviet encirclement and occupation of the airdromes involved on the 31st.²

In fact, despite the visible Soviet withdrawal from Budapest, and from other prominent points in Hungary, and despite some crossings from Hungary back into the Soviet Union at the more populous border towns, all evidence indicates that the Soviet forces in Hungary were being augmented continuously by back roads during this period, that some units were moving only in deceptive circles, that strategic points in Hungary were being quietly occupied, including most airdromes, that supporting units were being moved west through Czechoslovakia and Rumania, and, in short, that on each day from October 18 through November 4, 1956, the Soviets had larger forces

1. Ibid, p. 365

2. United Nations, Op.Cit., par. 174.

in Hungary than they had had on the previous day.¹

The Russian Warsaw Pact contingent in Hungary had on the 18th been two divisions, the 2nd and 17th Mechanized divisions. Elements of the 32nd and 34th Mechanized divisions arrived in Hungary between October 18 and 24, taking part in the first encounter in Budapest.² Evidence indicates that at least ten more Soviet divisions entered Hungary between 24 October and 4 November (reports of heavy new arrivals being available as early as 29 October, the day after the truce).³

The Hungarian army, which on the 13th of October had consisted of 9 infantry and 2 armored divisions, had generally disintegrated as a military force by the 28th; while a very few AVH men were willing to fight for the Russians, and some small regular army units remained intact and available for use by the Nagy government, many high ranking officers had been confined by the Soviets, a number of enlisted men had shed their uniforms to join the "freedom fighters" as individuals, and the greater part of the rank and file had just gone home.⁴ The Hungarian army was not destined to serve as an effective instrument of the Russians, or as an effective instrument against the Russians.

The power odds over the period of 24 October to 4

1. Ibid, par. 178-183.

2. Ibid.

3. Barber, Op. Cit., p. 96.

4. United Nations, Op. Cit., par.188-192.

November thus became a confrontation of 14 divisions on one side, against, on the other, a loose structure of "freedom fighter" formations scattered throughout Hungary, formations reluctant to take orders from any central source, the central command itself lacking any continuity with the previous military hierarchy. (due to the loss of almost all its senior officers) the two new Hungarian military leaders being Pal Maleter (promoted rapidly from his initial rank of Colonel) and General Bela Kiraly, who had just been released from prison (along with Cardinal Mindzenty, and large numbers of other prisoners, political and otherwise).¹

The visible Soviet withdrawals, such as they were, led in several cases to extremely insulting behavior on the part of groups of Hungarians in the Budapest area, including the desecration of Soviet army cemeteries and memorials, and several instances of abuse of Soviet army dependents embarking on Danube steamers.²

Expressions of strong support for Nagy came after the 28th from Yugoslav Marshal Tito, who however urged caution on the Hungarians against the threat of "counter-revolutionary" extremes. Privately Tito's envoys suggested the possibility of the entry of Yugoslav forces into Hungary as a stabilizing agent.³

Soviet forces were still moving about Poland over

1. Tejto, Op. Cit., p. 205.

2. Bain, Op. Cit., p. 161.

3. Lowenthal, Op. Cit., p. 17.

the period between the 21st of October and the 1st of November, the Russian contingent never having diminished to its original strength. While no new distinctly threatening moves toward Warsaw were reported, several major repositionings of the Soviet forces led to alarms in the capital. Gomulka, continuing his negotiations with Soviet representatives, stepped up his efforts to consolidate his hold on and "de-Russify" the 12 division Polish army, and publicly expressed his recognition and approval of the Nagy regime.¹

While the reaction of the other satellites to the events in Hungary oscillated between silence and severe condemnation of the Hungarians, significant signs of sympathy began to appear, however, in the Soviet Union. The Soviet government had never, in fact, specifically attacked any Hungarian faction, but had merely spoken vaguely of "fascists" and "counterrevolutionaries"; on Tuesday, the 30th of October, it now issued a statement describing the Nagy regime as trustworthy, recognizing the validity of various Hungarian grievances, and offering substantial concessions.²

Western observers of the Hungarian cease-fire and governmental changes showed understandable pleasure, as witnessed in a major campaign speech by President Eisenhower on the 31st, in which he however also reaffirmed

¹. Economist, 181 (November 3, 1956), p. 401.

². Vali, Op. Cit., p. 345.

his feeling that the United States had not been, and would not be, ethically or physically able to support by military force the developments it so much approved.¹

Material aid in the form of medical and food supplies had become available to the Hungarians immediately after the fighting and would remain so (coming, in fact, not only from Western sources, but also from various international agencies, from several neutral states, and even from other Soviet satellites), but no attempt was to be made to ship arms in any form to the Hungarians.²

The bulk of President Eisenhower's speech of the 31st, as the bulk of world attention, had been diverted, however, to a war which had broken out between Israel and Egypt on the 29th of October, in which Great Britain and France had indicated they would intervene after the 30th.

Mikoyan and Suslov arrived in Budapest a second time on Tuesday, the 30th of October, and entered into negotiations with Nagy, Kadar and Tilcy, after which they were to return to Moscow on the 1st of November. Mikoyan and Suslov conveyed to the Hungarians a general acceptance of most of the liberalizing steps taken to date by Nagy, and furthermore indicated a willingness to negotiate the external demands of the rebels, the most serious of which, of course, was the demand for total Soviet military withdrawal from Hungary. While the Soviets offered at this

1. Vital Speeches of the Day, XXIII (November 30, 1956) p. 227.

2. Bein, Op. Cit., p. 165.

point to pull out all but their Warsaw Pact contingent, they insisted however that the future of that contingent was a matter for all members of the pact to agree upon.¹

Hungarian protests against the increases in Russian troops were answered by an explanation that the forces entering Hungary were intended only to support the orderly withdrawal of the outgoing forces, as the troops occupying the airdromes were similarly there only to facilitate the air evacuation of Russian dependents and wounded.²

Negotiations between Soviet representatives and the Hungarians continued after Mikoyan and Suslov left, the Hungarians however seeing greater and greater numbers of Soviet troops entering Hungary, being able to do little but hope that Soviet assurances were genuine. Some efforts were made by Nagy, to build a deterrent by bringing his army together, and to prepare defense plans for Budapest, but next to nothing was to come of it.³ Attempts to deter the Russians, by threatening the cancellation of the Warsaw Pact and a declaration of neutrality (which Nagy was more or less committed to doing anyway), were similarly ineffective. Nagy's cancellation of the pact (following the failure of the Soviets to stop their troop movements on the 31st) was announced on Thursday, November 1.⁴ The

1. Raymond Garthoff, "The Tragedy of Hungary", Problems of Communism, VI (January-February, 1957), p. 7.

2. Bela Kiraly, "How Russian Trickery Throttled Revolt", Life, 42 (February 18, 1957), p. 123.

3. United Nations, Op. Cit., par. 194.

4. Vali, Op. Cit., p. 365.

announcement of neutrality, with an appeal for its recognition by the United Nations, followed on the 2nd, the message to the U.N. proposing a four-power (including the U.S.S.R.) guarantee.¹

The United States, Great Britain and France secured another meeting of the Security Council on the 2nd of November, which put Nagy's plea on the agenda for the 3rd; Security Council deliberations continued into late evening of the 3rd, when they were suspended until Monday, the 5th, with the proviso that the Council would assemble quickly again if any further news arrived from Budapest.²

On or about November 1, Janos Kadar, the newly appointed First Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, apparently entered into private negotiations with Soviet representatives, as a result of which he left Hungary on the 2nd for Uzghorod, in the trans-Carpathian Ukraine, from whence he secretly returned to Szolok (a city in eastern Hungary) on the 3rd to form a new government under Soviet aegis.³

In Budapest, on the 3rd of November, Nagy went still further, reshuffling his government to include more non-Communist representatives from the Smallholders and reformed Social Democrats.⁴

The situation between the 28th of October and 3rd of November thus was one of rapidly increasing Soviet military

1. United Nations, Op. Cit., par. 326.

2. New York Times, November 5, 1956, p 1:4.

3. Vali, Op. Cit., p. 359.

4. Ibid, p. 298.

strength, and of a gradual loss of Nagy's attractiveness in Soviet eyes. At some point in time (most likely right after the second return of Mikoyan and Suslov to Moscow) the gains of intervention again began to outweigh the costs, in the calculations of the majority of the Soviet leadership. Individual members of the Soviet leadership differed of course (at times seriously) in the extent of their desires for liberalization of the satellites, in their appraisals of the facts and alternatives involved, and in their commitment to peculiar institutional interests. The Red Army representatives in the Presidium may indeed have been peculiarly anxious to achieve a military "victory" to avenge some of the indignities that the army had been subjected to. The "Stalinists" of the group (those who had been least committed to liberalizations) also would be among the earliest, perhaps, to urge intervention.

Yet the intensity of such disagreements, or the rigidity of the blocs formed over such disagreements, can easily be exaggerated, and the factors leading toward a decision for intervention would inevitably interest all the Soviet leaders.

The British and French involvement in Egypt may have contributed to this decision, by diverting world attention and thereby reducing the anticipated costs in terms of neutral disapproval of Soviet military action; given the visible trend in Hungarian intentions and capabilities, however, the Soviet decision to act was inevitable, regardless

of the events in Egypt.

While the Soviets may still have regretted not bringing Nagy to power before the revolution had begun, the definitely now regretted having allowed him to assume power after the revolution, and the decision was made to remove him.

VI. November 4-30

The Hungarian delegation to the negotiations with the Soviet Army (including Pal Maleter) was arrested by Russian security police late on the evening of the 3rd, or early on the morning of the 4th of November, at a banquet to which it had been invited by its Russian opposite number.¹ Soviet armed forces which had been closing in on Budapest for the past two days entered the city itself overnight and began firing at 4:25 A.M.² This was the beginning of the third and final instance of combat in the military operations in eastern Europe of the fall of 1956.

The Nagy government served no further function after this final outbreak of violence, except to make a last vague plea to the world for assistance. Various independent local radio stations went further and began to ask for specifically military aid in the form of airborne troops (inferentially Western airborne troops), but these appeals were really the first acts on the Hungarian side that could in any way be construed as steps beyond neutrality toward a pro-Western alignment, and significantly, the Nagy group was not in any way responsible for them.³

Armed resistance of sorts persisted through various portions of Hungary, but in every case it was of a disorganized, local, guerilla form, which could not inflict

1. Kinsaly, Op. Cit., p. 127.

2. Hungarian Committee, Facts About Hungary, New York, 1958, p. 86.

3. Free Europe Committee, The Revolt in Hungary, New York, 1957, p. 87.

great pain on the Soviets, or deny them strategic control and eventually complete political domination of Hungary. In the suppression of this guerilla resistance in Budapest itself, less reluctance was shown than in the earlier period by the Russians in destroying buildings sheltering snipers and bomb-throwers.¹

Nagy personally sought asylum under the protection of the Yugoslav embassy, from whose custody he was later to slip (on the 22nd of November) into that of the Russian police.²

The preponderantly unfavorable response of the West to the final Soviet intervention showed itself at the United Nations in New York on the 4th of November, where, after a pre-dawn session of the Security Council, called in response to the news from Budapest, had ended in a Soviet veto, the General Assembly passed a resolution demanding Soviet withdrawal from Hungary. In Washington, President Eisenhower addressed a similar message to Soviet Premier Bulganin.³

Yet no physical military action was threatened by the United States or any other Western military power at this time, as none had been in the entire period since the 18th of October. It was not, in fact, until the 7th of November, after somewhat vague statements by Bulganin implying

1. United Nations, Op. Cit., par. 197.

2. Lowenthal, Op. Cit., p. 14.

3. New York Times, November 5, 1956, p. 1:4.

massive Soviet retaliation for the British and French landings in Egypt, that any significant change occurred in the military posture of the United States, orders being given on the 7th for the upgrading of the alert status of those Navy and Air Force (particularly S.A.C.) units which would play a role in responding to a massive Soviet attack, but not altering the disposition of any of the ten N.A.T.O. divisions stationed in West Germany.¹

Yugoslav Marshal Tito's reaction to the final outbreak of violence was moderate, showing a willingness to support the Soviet Union in the United Nations, to somewhat ambiguously excuse the Soviet action in Hungary, and to endorse the ostensibly "de-Stalinized" Kadar government.² Similarly the Polish government gave an unenthusiastic endorsement to the actions taken, the situation in Poland being complicated by several more Soviet troop movements about the country, which on November 7 again triggered defensive preparatory reactions by the Gomulka government.³

Fighting in Hungary was almost completely over by the end of November, by which time the positioning of military forces in Poland had also begun to show some stability (a stability which was formalized by an agreement signed between Poland and the Soviet Union on December 17, defining the functions of Soviet troops and giving the Polish government a formal voice in their movements).⁴ Thus ended the military operations of the fall of 1956 in eastern Europe.

1. Ibid, November 9, 1956, p. 22:1.

2. Lowenthal, Op. Cit., p. 13.

3. New York Times, November 8, 1956, p. 1:1.

4. Ibid, December 18, 1956, p. 1:6.

VII. Conclusions

In a broad sense the mistakes and miscalculations of Soviet policy between 1953 and 1956 bear the responsibility not only for the outbreak of instances of warfare in eastern Europe, but also for the nature of the outcome of these wars. Such wars were only possible because the Soviet leadership, in trying to balance its conflicting aims of liberalization and hegemony, unwittingly allowed Poland and Hungary to become, at least temporarily, militarily independent powers.

Yet the policies that had been followed by the Soviets in trying to achieve a transition in Poland differed from those applied to Hungary, if only because the problem in terms of party and popular dynamics was not seen to be the same in the two countries. The final culmination of these policies produced a strong integrated adversary (and a stability) in Poland, but in Hungary there resulted a violent instability as the growth of Soviet military strength completely overwhelmed that of the weak and fragmented rebel regime.

Nagy's final inability to establish a stable regime (i.e. his inability to deter the Soviets from destroying it) can be traced primarily to the military weakness of his regime, a weakness due to the process of his assumption of power. While the Gomulka group had found a gradual and subtle take-over of the Polish party possible, enabling it to make

immediate use of the existing party, governmental and military discipline systems, the accession of Nagy was the culmination of a long and bitter struggle against the "Stalinists", a struggle in which Moscow had several times changed sides.

This struggle served not only to deny Nagy an immediately complete assumption of power, but it resulted also in the transferring of the dynamics of the change to lower levels of the party, or completely outside the party, resulting in the rise of a myriad of undisciplined political splinter groups. The slowness of Nagy's final take-over allowed the Soviets to neutralize the Hungarian army; the fragmentation ensuing from this take-over prevented Nagy from developing a substitute for the army, prevented him in fact from speaking for all of Hungary in any threats or promises he might try to make in his dealings with the Russians.

Whether Nagy could have stabilized his regime without settling for domestic reforms and giving up neutralization and independence for Hungary is doubtful; whether he could have done so under any circumstances while he was unable to counterbalance the growth of Soviet military strength is very doubtful.

Gomulka's solution was a more moderate one, which, after military stability was achieved, continued to evolve into new forms. Yet the fact that Gomulka was

able to stay in power at all is due to a large extent to the Polish military capabilities which deterred the Soviets from intervention.

Gomulka's success (and Nagy's potential success) offered advantages to the West in the weakening of the Soviet military position in Europe; yet the fact that Western interests coincided with those of the rebels did not seem to outweigh the obviously heavy costs to the West of giving military aid, and neither Gomulka nor Nagy showed any inclination to rely on help from the West, or to commit themselves to such aid, or even to recognize its possible significance.

The avowed military policy of the United States in 1956 was one of massive atomic retaliation against Soviet aggression. Not only was there considerable doubt, however, whether such a policy would be believable in cases of clear-cut aggression, but the demands of the policy itself were quite ambiguous for a case of Soviet forces, legally in a country, suddenly becoming engaged in warfare; if one tried to draw any line through Hungary in this period, the Red Army would very likely already be on both sides of it. Since Soviet forces were continuously in Hungary over the period of the revolt, scattered throughout the country, any such project as the sending of a token American force as a "plate glass window" to be backed up by a threat of massive retaliation was impractical, if only because the

- "window" would very likely be "broken" accidentally during the effort to put it into place. (The Yugoslav proposal to get its forces into Hungary, with offended world neutrality rather than atomic war to be the cost of breaking the barrier, was similarly unfeasible.)

A military alternative to the threat of massive retaliation was the supplying of aid to the Hungarians in the form of conventional military equipment or forces. Such aid however was made considerably less likely by the problem of Austrian neutrality, by the slight possibility that the Soviets might themselves massively retaliate, and, most significantly, by the inability of the N.A.T.O. powers to muster forces or equipment capable of getting to Hungary in time to counter the fourteen Soviet divisions active there (fourteen divisions backed by twenty more in East Germany, the six in Poland, two in Rumania, and perhaps thirty in the western Soviet Union).¹

Another military alternative, total inaction, openly labelled as such, was the policy adopted by the West, and nothing was done to cause the Soviet leadership any apprehensions about an intrusion of Western conventional or nuclear armaments into eastern Europe. Western action throughout was thus limited to appeals to world opinion, and the radio broadcasts from Munich.

The effect of the broadcasts can easily be exaggerated, the broadcasts being perhaps most significant in the degree

¹. Ibid, December 23, 1956, IV, p. 3:4.

to which they undermined Nagy's reputation and thereby exacerbated the fragmentation and weakness of the Hungarian forces. Yet this fragmentation was the case from the start, and was only in small part due to outside influences.

Since the Western desire for active alliance with rebellion in the satellites was so clearly limited, by the physical and military realities of the problem, it is easy to see that the motivation of the rebels in Poland and Hungary was not likely to pattern itself in terms of the East-West struggle, but in terms rather of what these countries could hope and try to accomplish on their own. If the radio broadcasts thus had any effect in accelerating Nagy's program, it was a small one. As much as Nagy would perhaps have liked the existence of a Western counterweight to Soviet power, he knew that it did not exist, and American approval of actions would not persuade him to go much further than he had already intended to (which was, nonetheless, quite far). The lack of appeals for Western aid until the last days of the rebellion was due to the small prospect of gain in such appeals, and (until the Soviets committed themselves to intervene) the large prospects of loss.

The wars fought thus were East-West wars in the sense that both interests were involved, and incompatibly so. Yet while the West may have welcomed the occurrence of these outbreaks, it was not responsible for their occurrence;

while the East was responsible for the outbreaks, it had never desired their occurrence.

The upheavals in Poland and Hungary in late 1956 are examples of local limited war, made possible by Soviet policies which inadvertently allowed military adversaries of varying strengths and integration to come into existence, thereby initiating a process of military interaction and bargaining which reached a stability in Poland, but which ended in a total Soviet victory in Hungary. Although Western ends were potentially served by these events, little credit can be given to Western influence in provoking them, and the identity of interest was not seen by the West, by the Hungarians, or by the Poles as logically leading to a cooperative alliance.

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